DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 022 549 PS 001 235

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF THE NEGATIVE.
Pub Date [67]
Note-7p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.36
Descriptors-*LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, *LANGUAGE RESEARCH, LANGUAGE SKILLS, LANGUAGE USAGE, *NEGATIVE FORMS (LANGUAGE), *PRESCHOOL CHILDREN, *SYNTAX, THOUGHT PROCESSES

To measure the effectiveness of an intervention program of language development, it is necessary to understand childrens' knowledge and use of grammatical structures. In both standard and dialectal English, grammar rules are learned without formal instruction for forming the negative, interrogative, and other parts of speech. A mental transformation takes place when a statement is converted to a question. Since the relationship between thought and language is reflected by changes in grammar, these are of psychological importance to learning and intellectual ability. A recent doctoral study is cited which describes the development of forms of the negative in the language of three children. (MS)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF THE NEGATIVE

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PS001235 ED022549

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORMS OF THE NEGATIVE .

The problem of how to analyze a young child's language to assess his knowledge and use of grammatical structures is of concern to many investigators. In particular it is of concern to those who are working with disadvantaged children to improve language, and who want to know how well their manipulative treatments are working. There are, of course, standardized tests of vocabulary like the Peabody that provide certain kinds of information, but size of vocabulary which the Peabody measures is only one clue to a child's language competence. It does not reveal much about the relationship between thought and language. Vocabulary is built through associative learning; the child must learn to associate particular spoken labels with objects or pictures of objects. It is only when he can perform certain operations upon language that higher learning processes are involved. Such operations are necessary, for example, in transforming positive statements to the negative, or in combining separate classes of objects (bananas and oranges) into a higher class (fruit).

One of the aspects of verbal behavior that is closely related to thought and that is currently being investigated is syntactical behavior. Syntactical behavior refers to the child's use of syntax, to the rules he uses in putting words and inflections together to express ideas. What rules does he appear to use in asking questions? Does he use auxiliary verbs as in the question, "Where are we going, Mommy?" or does he use the more primitive form, "Where we go, Mommy?" indicating that he has not yet derived the rule for

using an auxiliary verb (are) with the participial form (going), with the subject inserted between the two. Such rules are derived by the child without benefit of instruction; somehow it becomes possible for him to transform the positive statement, "We're going to the store," to the question, "Are we going to the store?"

Many writers are pointing out that the ability to make changes in thought by changes in grammar is of great psychological importance to learning and intellectual ability, although exactly why and how it facilitates learning we do not know. Acquiring syntax demands certain mental transformations. The young child hears, "Go ask daddy where the hammer is," and must transform the command to a question, the wording of which he has never heard, "Daddy, where's the hammer?" Exposure to a variety of syntactical structures determines how well the child will be able to carry on such mental transformations, and carrying on such mental operations is believed to influence intellectual ability.

Psycholinguists are only just beginning to describe the developmental changes in syntactical structures found in the speech of preschool children. All children acquire rules of grammar for forming negatives; interrogatives, and other parts of speech without formal instruction. All children change their rules from time to time in the course of development. The rules may not always conform to standard English, but the rules are there, and the learning task is just as demanding for learning the rules in a dialect as for learning the rules of standard English. As we know more about developmental changes in syntax during the preschool years, it will be possible to assess

one child's progress against a typical pattern for either his social-class group or a pattern of standard English. It will also be possible to measure more effectively the impact of intervention programs to improve language development.

Part of the May 19, 1967 conference on language development was devoted to a discussion of children's growth in one system of the language-that of negation. Mrs. Bellugi-Klima whose recent (1967) doctoral dissertation at Harvard University was a study entitled, The Acquisition of Negation, reviewed briefly the developmental sequence in formation of negatives that her study revealed. The section below is a paraphrasing of her remarks. She begins by pointing out procedures that we follow in English when we want to negate sentences where an indefinite word like "some" or "any" occurs.

The Development of Forms of the Negative

Let's look at the problem of the relationship of negative to indefinite. Let's begin with what an indefinite is, in grammatical terms. I can call this object in front of me a glass. I can also refer to it as "it" which is a more general term, in the sense that "it" can refer to many things such as this table or my pen. There are other pronouns, like "some," that are still more indefinite. "I want some" is not quite as definite as "I want it." In order to negate an English sentence, there are certain procedures to follow. Take the sentence, "I want this glass;" negation of the sentence would be, "I don't want it." However, if the sentence is, "I want some water," negation of that

sentence is not, "I don't want some water," but rather, "I don't want any water." Here negating the statement does not mean simply that a form of "not" is inserted in the original statement, but that the insertion of the negative changes other grammatical structures in the sentence. The relationship between the negative and other parts of the sentence is a very complex and delicate one. Consider the sentence, "I want to drive my car to the corner and put some gas in it." If this sentence is negated, despite the fact that it contains two propositions, the negative at the beginning will still affect the indefinite "some," and the sentence changes to "I don't want to drive my car to the corner and put any gas in it." The situation can be even more complex in the case of a negative at the beginning of the sentence. If one wants to negate the sentence, "Someone closed the door," one does not say, "Someone didn't close the door," nor, "Anyone didn't close the door," but one says, "No one closed the door."

One cannot say that the negative always changes an indefinite "some" to an indefinite "any." Which form of the indefinite is used depends upon where the indefinite appears. If the indefinite is located after the verb, one changes the "some" to "any," although there are optional forms available like "I want none" instead of "I don't want any." But if the indefinite appears before the verb as in "someone closed the door," the negative is absorbed into the beginning. The sentence becomes, "No one closed the door,"

and no other negatives appear in the sentence.

The rules governing these changes are late rules of grammar, meaning that they are rules applied after many other grammatical rules are acquired. With the three children studied intensively at Harvard, what first appeared was no change in the relationship between negation and the indefinite. The children said, "I want some supper," but when the negated, all three said, "I don't want some supper." The absence of change in the indefinite raises the interesting question of whether the children understand the conventional form, even though it does not appear spontaneously, and whether it can be elicited. Eliciting situations like the following might be set up:

Suppose you have two pictures, one of a boy with a hat, and one of a boy without. You can say to the child, "This boy has a hat," and, "This boy doesn't have_____," with the child to supply the necessary word or words.

Or, you can have the child act out what you describe. For example, you can show the child a set of blocks and a little doll, and ask him to show you, "The doll pushes some of the blocks," and "The doll pushes none of the blocks." Such a test might reveal his comprehension of the negative form.

The question was raised at the conference as to the applicability of research findings from one subcultural group to another. For example, do we know how the negative is expressed in various subcultural groups? We do know that multiple negation occurs in dialects in such forms as "He

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ain't got no pencil." The children in the Bellugi-Klima study also used multiple negation, but with particular restrictions. That is, if the negation occured at the beginning of the sentence as with the word, "Nobody," the children used additional negatives elsewhere in the sentence, "Nobody didn't do nothing." In fact, a negative was inserted at every possible point. (It might be noted here in passing that in some foreign languages negatives are inserted in more than one place in a sentence.)

It would be interesting to know whether or not the same multiple negation occurs in the dialect. Some linguists have claimed that restrictions in the dialect do occur, as in the sentence "You didn't find nobody didn't take it." However, there are still questions about how negatives are used when auxiliary verbs are employed, and what special forms occur in different dialects.